Sketches of the Westminster Assembly

Spence

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# SKETCHES OF THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY

With a

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

BASED ON THE HOLDINGS OF THE

# HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

of the

PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED CHURCHES

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By Thomas H. Spence

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# A CALL FROM PARLIAMENT

In response to the rising demand for a church council,[1] and after earlier moves[2] had failed, Parliament, on June 12, 1643, issued a call[3] for an assembly of "learned, judicious, and godly divines." This convocation was to convene at Westminster for the purpose of drawing up the necessary standards for an official, or state church; since Episcopacy was in the process[4] of abolishment, and a desire was evident for a revision of the articles of faith. It was stipulated that the Divines were to receive four shillings per day for their services. King Charles I, in what he termed a "gracious warning," forbade the meeting and promised a fine and imprisonment, in lieu of the four shillings, to those who dared attend. The function of the assembly was to be advisory,[5] for the power of enactment was retained by Parliament, even though the matters under consideration were of an ecclesiastical, rather than civil character.

The Historical Foundation has:

1 *The heads of reasons, for which a generall councell of Protestants ought to be called together in England. Published by authoritie . . .* London. 1641. This pamphlet advocates a council composed of representatives from the various Protestant nations.

2 *An exact collection of all remonstrances, declarations . . . betweene the kings most excellent majesty, and . . . Parliament . . .* London. 1643. Such efforts are indicated on pp. 604-05, 659.

3 Rushworth, John: *Historical Collections . . .* 8 vols. London. 1721-22. Parliament's call for the Assembly is found in vol. 2, pp. 337-39.

4 *Two ordinances of the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament. One for the abolishing of archbishops . . .* London. 1646. Although initial steps in this direction were taken early in 1642, the enacting laws were not passed until the autumn of 1646.

5 *The humble advice of the Assembly of divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster; concerning a confession of faith: with the quotations and texts of Scripture annexed. Presented by them lately to both houses of Parliament. A certain number of copies are ordered to be printed onely for the use of the members of both houses, and of the Assembly of divines, to the end that they may advise thereupon. Printed at London: and re-printed at Edinburgh by Evan Tyler, printer to the kings most excellent majestie. 1647.* This is one of three hundred copies issued by order of the General Assembly (Scots) for the use of that body.

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# THE ASSEMBLY IN SESSION

The first of the 1163 regular and numbered sessions of the Assembly was held on July 1, 1643. After a sermon in the Abbey Church by Rev. William Twisse,[1] the moderator, the members met in the Chapel of Henry VII, though the approach of a London winter later impelled withdrawal to the more comfortable quarters of the Jerusalem Chamber of the Abbey.

The Divines were committed by vow to "maintain nothing in point of doctrine" other than that which they believed to be "most agreeable to the Word of God," and Parliament evidenced a rather remarkable concern in this connection by returning the Confession that Scripture texts might be appended. Members of the Assembly preached numerous sermons[2] during the sessions, some of which proved so popular in printed form that they were issued in "bootleg" fashion by unauthorized publishers.[3]

Dr. Alexander Mitchell has suggested that the commissioners wore their hats while sitting, and that the most accurate pictorial idea of the appearance of the body is to be derived from a drawing published in Quick's *Synodicon*.[4]

The real work of the Assembly was accomplished by the autumn of 1648, although it continued a mitigated existence until the spring of 1652.

The Historical Foundation has:

[1] Twisse, William: *The riches of Gods love.* Oxford. 1653. This posthumous work was published after the close of the Assembly.

[2] Gillespie, George: *A sermon preached before the honourable house of Commons at their late solemne fast Wednesday March 27. 1644.* . . . London. 1644.

Marshall, Stephen: *A divine project to save a kingdome: opened in a sermon to the right honorable the lord maior and court of aldermen, of the citie of London. . . Apr. 22. 1644 . . . Imprimatur, Charles Herle* . . . London.

(Grey, Zachary): *A century of eminent Presbyterian preachers. Or, a collection of choice sayings from publick sermons preached before the two houses . . . In which the seditious and republican principles of a great part of the celebrated Assembly of divines are detected, their flowers of rhetorick display'd, and their hypocrisy and gross ignorance expos'd* . . . London. 1723. The author, as may be judged from the title, thought none too highly of many of the Divines.

[3] Calamy, Edmund: *An indictment against England because of her selfe-murdering divisions: . . . Presented in a sermon preached before the right honourable house of Lords . . . at the late solemne fast, December 25. 1644 . . . Printed by I. L. for Christopher Meredith* . . . London. 1645. This carries the order of the Lords that "none shall print or publish his said sermon without being authorised so to doe under the hand of the said Master Calamy," and the appointment of Meredith "to print this sermon, and no man else," indicating the precautions taken against unauthorized distribution.

[4] Quick, John: *Synodicon in Gallia reformata.* 2 vols. London. 1692. The drawing, which idealizes a council in France, precedes the title page of volume one.

# SCOTS IN LONDON

Supplementing earlier efforts[1] to secure the support of the Scots, members of the Assembly and of the Commons took the Solemn League and Covenant,[2] Sept. 25, 1643,[3] while the Lords did likewise on Oct. 15. Eight commissioners had been appointed by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland,[4] a number of whom had arrived and taken their seats on Sept. 15. Among these were Robert Baillie,[5] principal of the University of Glasgow; George Gillespie,[6] pastor in Edinburgh;

The Historical Foundation has:

1 *A declaration and resolution of the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament, in answer to the Scots declaration. Wherein is set forth the true zeal and affection betwixt both kingdoms, for the reformation of church-government . . . Printed for Edward Husbands and John Franck, and are to be sold at their shops, in the Middle temple, and next door to the Kings head in Fleet street. . . .* London. 1642.

2 *An ordinance of the Lords and Commons . . . with instructions for the taking of the League and Covenant . . .* London. Ordered published, Feb. 5, 1643.

*A testimony to the truth of Jesus Christ, and to our Solemn League and Covenant . . . Subscribed by the ministers of Christ within the province of London, Decemb. 14. &c. 1647 . . .* London. 1648.

3 Pitman, J. R., Editor: *The journal of the proceedings of the Assembly of divines: from January 1, 1643, to December 31, 1644.* In vol. 13 of *The whole works of Rev. John Lightfoot, D. D.* London. 1822-25.

4 *The principall acts of the Generall Assembly, conveened at Edinburgh the second day of August 1643.* Edin. 1643. Appointment of the commissioners is recorded on pages 40-41.

5 Baylie, Robert: *A dissuasive from the errours of the time . . . Printed . . . at the Brasen serpent in Pauls church-yard.* London. 1645.

Laing, David, Editor: *The letters and journals of Robert Baillie, A. M.* 3 vols. Edin. 1841-42.

6 Gillespie, George: *Aaron's rod blossoming.* London. 1646.

(Gillespie, George): *CXI propositions concerning the ministerie and government of the church.* Edin. 1647.

(Gillespie, George): *A dispute against the English-popish ceremonies obtruded upon the church of Scotland.* 1660.

Gillespie, George: *A treatise of miscellany questions . . . Published by Mr. Patrik Gillespie . . . Printed by Gedeon Lithgow, printer to the University of Edinburgh . . .* Edin. 1649.

Gillespie, George: *Usefull case of conscience discussed and resolved, concerning associations and confederacies with idolaters, infidels, hereticks, or any other known enemies of truth and godlinesse.* Edin. 1649.

# SCOTS IN LONDON

Alexander Henderson,[7] rector of Edinburgh University; and Samuel Rutherford,[8] of the faculty of St. Andrews; ministers of the Church. The fifth clerical representative, Rev. Robert Douglas, was never enrolled, as was also true of one of the three lay commissioners. The Scots, though not permitted to vote, exercised a strong influence in the deliberations of the Assembly,[9] prior to subsequent negotiations between the two countries.[10]

7 (Henderson, Alexander): *The platforme of the Presbyterian government: with the forme of church-worship . . . Printed by R. Austin, in the old-Baily.* London. 1644.

8 Rutherfurd, Samuel: *The divine right of church government and excommunication . . . Printed . . . for Christopher Meredith at the Crane in Pauls church-yard.* London. 1646.

Rutherfurd, Samuel: *The due right of presbyteries or, a peaceable plea for the government of the church of Scotland.* London. 1644.

(Rutherfurd, Samuel): *Letters . . . 1639-1661.* Edin. 1867.

(Rutherfurd, Samuel): *Lex, rex: the law and the prince. A dispute for the just prerogative of king and people. Containing the reasons and causes of the most necessary defensive wars of the kingdom of Scotland, and of their expedition for the ayd and help of their dear brethren of England . . . Printed for John Field, and are to be sold at his house upon Addle-hill, neer Baynards-castle.* London. 1644.

Rutherfurd, Samuel: *A survey of the spirituall antichrist . . .* London. 1648.

Rutherfurd, Samuel: *A survey of the survey of that summe of church-discipline penned by Mr. Thomas Hooker, late pastor of the the church at Hartford upon Connecticot in New England . . .* London. 1658.

9 Mitchell, A. F. and Struthers, John, Editors: *Minutes of the sessions of the Westminster assembly of divines.* Edin. and London. 1874. Only a portion of the contents of the three existing volumes of manuscript minutes is reproduced.

10 *A letter from the house of Commons assembled in the Parliament of England . . . to the right honorable and right reverend, the lords, ministers and others of the present General Assembly of the church of Scotland . . . containing a narrative of the proceedings of the Parliament of England in the work of reformation . . .* London. 1648. This letter is addressed by the Commons to George "Gillespy" as moderator of the General Assembly.

*A declaration of the committee of the estates of Parliament of Scotland, to the honourable houses of the Parliament, and to all their brethren of England. Concerning the necessity, grounds and ends of their ingagement, and of the returne of the Scots army into England.* London. 1648.

# HERITAGE FROM WESTMINSTER

The abiding legacy of the Westminster Assembly to Presbyterians of succeeding generations is embodied in its Confession of Faith,[1] Larger[2] and Shorter[3] Catechisms, Form of Government,[4] and Directory for Worship.[5]

The Historical Foundation has:

1 *The humble advice of the Assembly of divines . . . concerning a confession of faith.* London. Re-printed at Edin. 1647. Variant form of edition listed on page 2.

2 *The humble advice of the Assembly of divines . . . concerning a larger and a shorter catechisme.* Edin. 1647. Without proofs, as originally submitted to Parliament. "Eight hundred copies and no more" were issued by order of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to be distributed among its presbyteries.

3 *The humble advice of the Assembly of divines . . . concerning a shorter catechisme.* 1649. With proofs.

4 *An ordinance of the Lords and Commons . . . for the ordination of ministers pro tempore . . .* London. 1644.

*An ordinance of the Lords and Commons . . . for the present setling (without further delay) of the Presbyteriall government in the church of England . . .* London. 1646.

An expanded edition of the above of same date.

*The way of the Presbiterian government, as it is established by both houses of Parliament, and to be setled in all parts of the Kingdome of England. Published the 27. of May, 1947 . . .* London. 1647. The figure six was obviously inverted in printing.

*The form of church-government to be used in the church of England and Ireland: agreed upon by the Lords and Commons . . . after advice had with the Assembly of divines.* London. 1648.

*A vindication of the Presbyteriall-government and ministry . . . Published, by the ministers, and elders, met together in a provinciall assembly, Novemb. 2d. 1649 . . .* London. 1650. pp. 152.

A later edition of the same year with 175 pp.

5 *A directory for the publique worship of God, throughout the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland . . . to be sold at the sign of the Bible in Cornhill, neer the Royall-exchange.* London. 1644.

*An ordinance of the Lords and Commons . . . for the more effectuall puting in execution the directory for publique worship . . .* London. 1645.

*A directory for the publike worship of God . . . with an act of the Generall Assembly of the kirk of Scotland, for establishing and observing this present directory . . .* Edin. 1645.

*Directions of the Generall Assembly concerning secret and private worship . . . and an act against such as withdraw themselves from the publike worship in their own congregations . . .* Edin. 1647.

# THROUGH CHANGING YEARS

The Westminster Standards have been subjected to a number of changes of varied scope by the different branches of the Presbyterian and other Calvinistic churches. The Savoy Declaration,[1] 1658, represents an early example. After the Revolution, the sections concerning the civil magistrate were altered by the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A.,[2] and similar changes are evident in the statements of the Associate Reformed Church.[3] A drastic revision, designed to effect a combination of Calvinism and Arminianism, was made by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church,[4] which was organized in 1810. The Constitution of the Independent Presbyterian Church[5] (1810-63) reveals the Westminster background of its authors. Upon the union of the Associate Reformed and Associate Presbyterian Churches, 1858, to form the United Presbyterian Church, the general example of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., in revising the teachings regarding civil rulers was followed,[6] while the Bible Presbyterian Church has recently (1938) inserted an article specifically teaching the doctrine of Premillennialism.[7]

The Historical Foundation has:

1 *A declaration of the faith and order owned and practised in the Congregational churches in England; agreed upon and consented unto . . . at the Savoy, Octob. 12. 1658 . . . to be sold in Paul's church-yard, Fleet-street, and Westminster-hall.* London. 1659.

2 *The constitution of the Presbyterian church in the United States of America . . . ratified and adopted by the synod of New-York and Philadelphia, held at Philadelphia May the 16th 1788 . . .* Phila. 1792.

3 *The constitution and standards of the Associate-Reformed church in North-America.* New York. 1799.

4 *The constitution of the Cumberland Presbyterian church in the United States of America . . . ratified and adopted by the synod of Cumberland . . . 1814.* Nashville. 1815.

5 *The constitution and form of government of the Independent Presbyterian church in the United States of America, as adopted by the churches in convention, held at Salem church, in Union district, So. Ca. A. D. 1838 . . .* Columbia. 1839. The presbytery is identified with the local church session.

6 *The confession of faith, agreed upon by the Assembly of divines at Westminster, as received by the United Presbyterian church of North America . . .* Phila. and Pittsburg. 1859.

7 *Form of government of the Bible Presbyterian church. Changes in the Westminster confession of faith and catechisms. Declaratory statement. Adopted . . . 1938.*